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SERMON CLIX.

By MARK TUCKER, D. D.

TROY, N. Y.

SOLEMN REBUKE TO THE UNGRATEFUL AND BACKSLIDING.

LUKE xvii. 17—*Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?*

In the original, were not "*the ten cleansed*," the word has the particle before it, referring to those recently healed: and in the Syriac version, the next verse is read interrogatively—*Are there none found returning to give glory to God, but this stranger?* The incidents in this narrative are interesting. It is matter of gratitude that there were those who followed the footsteps of our Savior to relate both what they saw and what they heard. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through the confines of Samaria and Gallilee. As he approached one of their villages, there met him ten men that were lepers, who stood afar off. The leprosy was a loathsome disease, an emblem of sin, which may be called the leprosy of the soul. The lepers, by the Jewish law, which was strictly enforced, were excluded from cities and the society of men, though they might consort together; which sufficiently accounts for the number mentioned here. A community of suffering created a community of interest. The fame of Jesus had spread so wide that even these lepers, secluded from the world, had heard of him. In the hope of obtaining relief from the dreadful malady that afflicted them, they lifted up their voices and said, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.* Distress made them earnest; a prospect of help gave them energy; and a common affliction united their hearts in the request. The Savior would teach them that salvation is of *faith*;—without pronouncing a cure, he directed them to go and show themselves to the priests, and "as they went they were cleansed." By going they evinced their confidence in his power. In the 19th verse, he says to the one that returned, "*Thy faith hath made thee whole.*" To make them feel their responsibility and to illustrate the methods of grace, he directed them, before the cure was effected, to go to the priests. He would al-

ways have us feel we are free agents; and yet dependent upon him for salvation. It appears that one of them, after they were healed, was so overcome with a sense of Divine goodness, that he at once returned to express his gratitude. *He turned back and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks.* His voice was now as loud in praise, as before in prayer. But it is melancholy to think that this humble Christian is found alone—the rest had not returned to make grateful acknowledgments to their Divine benefactor. Jesus turning to him said, *Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?*

These affecting incidents suggest a series of remarks, suited to the occasion and the times, and especially suited to those who have united themselves to the church by profession.

I. *The work of God upon the heart imposes a high obligation to live to his glory.* This is obviously implied by our Savior's pointed inquiry, "Are there none returned to give glory to God save this stranger?" It seems to denote surprise, as though nothing could be more reasonable than such an expression on the part of those who had been cleansed. The bestowment of kindness always carries with it an obligation to make a return; the obligation is great in proportion as the bounty is large, gratuitous, purely benevolent. Where it is undeserved, and bestowed from pure motives, every ingenuous heart will respond to the claim of gratitude. If we simply consulted nature, we should be taught this truth. Hence nothing is considered among all nations so vile as ingratitude. Some of the heathen poets have described it in terms that should crimson a Christian's cheek with shame. Look now at the peculiar obligation resting upon one "born of the Spirit," to glorify God. It may be illustrated by the case of the ten lepers. They were reduced to the lowest point of human wretchedness—shut out from friends and the endearments of domestic life. They suffered excruciating pain. The plague-spots showed that they were withering under the judgments of God. From all this degradation and misery, Christ delivered them. Could you have witnessed the change, you would feel the point of the inquiry, "*Where are the nine?*" Surely some expression of thanks is due from *such* men to *such* a Benefactor. What then does God expect of those who are rescued from a condition of which the poor lepers' state was only a faint emblem; of those who are "*brought out of darkness into marvellous light?*"

1. If you would feel the obligation, you must look at the *greatness of the favor*. And to estimate this, take into view the *lost condition* in which you were found. Here we wish you to remember the impression made upon your mind by the Spirit of God:—you felt all the strong figures employed in the Bible to describe your natural state, to be true—you

were, in a fearful sense, in a "*horrible pit*," under sentence of death—justly condemned by the law—your hearts were desperately wicked—your bosoms agitated with a tempest of passion. Have you not still in remembrance the wormwood and the gall? Look also at the *magnitude of the change*. You were *taken out of that horrible pit*. The sentence of the law was reversed—you were acquitted—received into divine favor—adopted into the family of God—sealed with the Spirit, the earnest of your inheritance. Is there nothing due for *such* blessings bestowed upon such a sinner?

2. Think of the glorious *Author* of your deliverance. Obligation is great in proportion to the character of the Benefactor. He is so infinitely exalted that he needs not our services. The motive for aiding us was found only in himself. So that salvation is all of grace. What less can we do then, than to speak forth his praise? If he pitied us when we were enemies, shall we not, when reconciled, live to his glory? We should honor his word by trusting in it—we should honor his providence by committing all to his care—we should honor his laws by obeying them—we should honor his church by serving it faithfully.

3. It is the *express object of this work to bring praise to God*. Jesus Christ did not enjoin it upon the lepers to return—true gratitude would have prompted them—so great a blessing, so remarkable an interposition, affecting the whole subsequent life, essentially changing their relations and destiny, called for a suitable return; but we are not left to spontaneous feeling; God has signified his design in calling us into his kingdom. He says to his children, *I have spared your lives, and ye shall be mine. Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. He imposes his command, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. For this is the will of God, that with well-doing ye put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.* Common justice would lead to an acknowledgment of mercies bestowed under such circumstances, but the appeal is to every high and honorable feeling in our nature. How right and reasonable that we come to his feet, and inquire, *Lord what wilt thou have us to do?*

II. *Those of least promise often shine the brightest.* "And he was a Samaritan." He belonged to a nation that was despised. He could have known but little of the character or claims of the Messiah. He was the last that might have been expected to return. While the others forgot their benefactor, "this stranger" gave the most gratifying evidence of the depth of his humility and the strength of his love. Often has this been exemplified in the church of God. While many who run well for a season, have turned back to the world, while some of those most confi-

dent of their good estate have relapsed into stupidity and sin, others who at first had but little light, but faint hopes, who scarcely dared to follow in the footsteps of the flock, have persevered in duty, made advancement in knowledge, risen in spiritual stature, their path shining more and more unto the perfect day. We can tell but little of Christian character from its first appearance. When the sympathies are excited, and the social feelings are enlisted, and the tide sets in strong in favor of religion, many profess attachment to Christ, who afterwards give but little evidence. On the other hand some, of whom we are ready to stand in doubt, who are encompassed with many infirmities, like feeble childhood, still make progress in the divine life, and rise to vigorous manhood.

III. *Many who experience signal mercies at the hand of God evince great ingratitude.* It is said that all those lepers were cleansed. Their petition was granted—Jesus had compassion on them and restored them to the enjoyment of life, which before was a burden. What a humbling view of human nature does it give to learn that *one only* of the whole number manifested a disposition suitably to acknowledge the benefits received. It has often been so. In the case of the nine, they were without the shadow of excuse for ingratitude. But this dark feature of depravity often cleaves to us even after we enter the visible church. Paul, whose great excellencies, whose untiring faithfulness, left no room for the charge of neglect, still had cause to complain of many he admitted to his fellowship. The great Head of the church, in establishing the means of grace, in appointing the ordinances of his house, and enacting the laws of his kingdom, doubtless had reference to a proper expression of attachment and confidence, as well as to the interests of his church. Hence we find that those whose hearts are softened by divine grace, who give evidence of religion, at the first are inclined to seek the Lord in the way of his appointment, even before they have specially consulted the law. The institutions of the gospel, prayer, the word, the sacraments, are the natural channels of Christian affection. Strict and conscientious observance of them, therefore, becomes a test of character, and shows the state of the heart. How should a redeemed sinner evince his gratitude to the Savior, if not by confession, by setting forth his most worthy praise, by waiting upon him in acts of worship, and striving to influence others to love and serve him? Our divine Benefactor, for our good, and because he would employ our service for the benefit of others, asserts a claim. He has appointed methods in which we are to express a sense of obligation. This appears so reasonable, that we voluntarily enter into covenant to observe his rules, engaging to walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless; and gratitude for such favors as we have received could not do less. When therefore the professed people of God, forsake the

closet, neglect social prayer, family worship, or the observance of the Sabbath, the inquiry may be solemnly made, *Do you thus requite the Lord?* Brethren, does the charge of ingratitude lie against us? I speak to those who have recently lifted up their hands unto God. Have you neglected secret prayer? have you transferred your affections again to the world? You once professed to give up every idol. Have you ceased to speak of Christ? You once were warm in his praise, and were not ashamed of him—you could “tell to those around, what a Savior you had found.” Do you neglect meetings for prayer? You once regarded them with interest, found them quickening and profitable. O, how mean and unworthy to suffer indolence, or worldly business to take stronger hold of your heart than the cause of God! Do you neglect the Bible? It was once your delight. How can you undervalue this precious communication, this epistle of love from the Friend of sinners? Do you forsake the sanctuary? Once you were glad when the friends of Zion said, *Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord.* Do you forsake the sacrament of the holy supper, or attend upon it with coldness? Once with holy awe and ardent love you desired to meet the Savior at his table. These are solemn inquiries; too solemn to be passed over in haste. Ingratitude to Christ, as we have seen, involves the deepest guilt; it is a denial of infinite obligations—it is a violation of covenant engagements. Having once enlisted under the banner of the cross there is no release. The true Christian desires none. The unstable and double-minded cannot draw back, without falling into perdition.

IV. *Jesus will make inquisition in regard to those who fail to give glory to God.* “*But where are the nine?*” He had not forgotten their obligation, though they neglected to acknowledge his goodness. In this implied censure he has taught us our accountability, a truth we are prone to forget. We are apt to make our feelings the standard. When the impression of God’s mercy is fresh and lively, we are ready to say that we are bound to live to him, to magnify his grace and exalt his honor; but when selfishness prevails, and we seek our own things, when we neglect our duty, when the affections are languid, or are pervaded by worldliness, then we lose a sense of obligation, conscience slumbers, and in our folly we seem to imagine that God doth not regard. The infidelity of the heart returns with its carnality; and as we go back to former habits of thought and life, we contract the hardness, the sophistry, the impenitence and unbelief of the unrenewed nature. In this we see the blinding, deceitful influence of sin. This explains the unconcern that often appears in a church that has fallen into moral sleep. They reason from the logic of a deceitful heart, and not from the immutable truths of God’s word, and are thus deceived, often fatally. They act under the monstrous delusion, that God is



altogether such an one as themselves. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily*—because judgment slumbers, they think but little blame attaches to neglect of duty. But moral obligation does not depend upon feeling; it is connected with permanent relations; it remains amidst all our fluctuations of joy and sorrow, hope and fear; it is imposed by divine goodness, and cannot be thrown off while we share in God's bounty, have a place in his church, or are the subjects of his government. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." The number of those spiritually healed is registered, as well in the book of his remembrance, as on the records of the church; and if any are deficient in duty, or fail to fulfill their vows, he will make inquisition. He is too much interested in them, as well as his cause, to suffer them to pursue a course injurious to both, without calling them to account. As he is in all places, and knows the secrets of all hearts, the history of all lives, it is not imaginary to suppose him present in the place of prayer, and looking round upon every vacant seat, noting every absent disciple, to enquire of those who have come to worship in his name, *Where are the nine?* And on the Sabbath, he stands upon the sacred heights of the sanctuary; marks those who, from any cause which he cannot approve, are not in his house, rendering praise to God; and asks, *Where are the nine?* We know that he is at the feast of the gospel passover, to refresh his people, to communicate his grace; and that he has commanded all his followers to be there to show forth his death; we may suppose that he will cast his searching eye over the assembly, and grieving to find any absent, will turn to the faithful and demand, *Where are the nine?* If the under shepherd or the office-bearers overlook any, and fail to be faithful or kind, that does not diminish your obligation to Christ, or render your vows less binding, and Christ himself will not overlook you. Some, like the woman who hid herself in the crowd, unwilling to acknowledge her cure, imagine that they are not known, and may therefore neglect to honor God without detection; but he who inquired, *Who touched me?*—he who knew that virtue, or healing power, had gone out of him, will complain; he will, sooner or later, make inquisition. When Peter, following his Master afar off, and ashamed to be known as his disciple, took his place with the servants, he imagined that he was unknown; he felt secure in his obscurity; but there was one there who knew him, who brought him out. And though you may be on a journey, among strangers, or in retirement, if you are shrinking from duty, and thus denying Christ, the providence of God will reveal your sin—you may be sure it will find you out. He is a just God, as well as Savior, and will therefore search, as with rays of light, every lurking place. He knows where you are, when absent from your sphere of duty.

V. Jesus will not only inquire after those who are guilty of neglect towards him, but he will take account of *the effects of such ingratitude*. Their own souls sustain deep and lasting injury. Such base treatment of the Son of God diminishes self-respect, destroys confidence in their good estate, induces darkness of mind. As obedience not only carries with it its own reward, but invigorates the moral powers in various ways, so does neglect of duty prove its own punishment, and give a shock to the moral sensibilities.

Such ingratitude as we have described *injures the church*. They rejoiced in the acquisition of numbers, and magnified the grace of God so largely bestowed upon men. Their expectations in regard to Zion were raised by seeing so many coming to her solemn feasts. They hoped that a larger cloud of incense would go up to heaven, and more efficient efforts be made for the conversion of sinners. They looked for great results. Alas, how does it try the faith, and increase the anxiety of the church, to see numbers virtually turn away from Christ, and walk no more with him. It is a great drawback to spiritual enjoyment for the established believer, to go to the circle of prayer, the place of accustomed meeting, and find many absent who were seated with him at the communion table, and who there renewed their solemn vows—he is ready to ask, Where are those who so recently gave themselves to the Lord and promised to be his forever? His mind is distracted. He mourns over disappointed hopes.

Great injury is also thus done *to the world*. The word is rendered ineffectual. Sinners will reject the gospel, so long as they see its professed friends indifferent to its truths. The natural heart is full of unbelief; this is strengthened greatly by the instability of nominal Christians. This one objection, *where are the nine?* where is the fruit of all those blossoms? where is the redemption of all those vows? will blunt the edge of truth, and throw a shield around the impenitent heart. O, brethren, by what arithmetic can you compute the amount of evil resulting from unfaithfulness to Christ? You will not consider me your enemy because I tell you the truth. God is witness, how greatly I desire your salvation and usefulness. Is it said, "there is too much distance in the church?" It is true, but does that excuse distance from Christ? Is it said, "the members are neglected?" It is true. I plead guilty. I have asked forgiveness of God; but will that afford you any comfort under the consciousness that you neglect your duty. Remember it is Christ you grieve by your ingratitude. If you blush to meet him in his house, how can you meet him on his throne? If you deny him here, will he not deny you there? What is to be done? *O Lord, revive thy work. Spare thy people, and give not thine heritage to reproach.*

## SERMON CLX.

By CORNELIUS C. CUYLER, D. D.  
PHILADELPHIA.

### CAUSES OF THE DECLINE OF REVIVALS.

HOSEA vi. 4—*O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*

The dealings of God with the children of Israel were eminently calculated to impress them deeply and influence them powerfully. Who could have witnessed the plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud and of fire, the healing of the waters at Marah, the gift of the quails and the manna, the promulgation of the law at Sinai, the blossoming of Aaron's rod, the flood of waters from the smitten rock, the destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and of Nadab and Abihu, the scene connected with the plague of the fiery serpents, the death of an entire generation in the wilderness, including Moses and Aaron, the passage of Jordan, the taking of Jericho, the conquest of Canaan, the settlement of the children of Israel in the land of promise, their subsequent history under the judges and kings, the many and peculiarly striking dispensations of Providence of which they were the subjects, connected with the ordinances of religion, and the instructions and warnings of prophets who came to them with divinely attested commissions,—who could have witnessed these, I say, and not be convinced of Jehovah's presence? That they were frequently and powerfully impressed, admits of no doubt. Humble acknowledgments were often made, and hopeful appearances were induced.

But who does not know how soon these impressions were erased from their minds, and how transient the reformations they produced?—how often like the morning cloud and the early dew? Take for an illustration the solemnities which occurred at Sinai. The declared object of their coming thither is to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are sanctified to hold a solemn interview with Him. They are daily feeding on the manna, and slaking their thirst with water which flowed from the smitten rock. The dreadful thunderings and lightnings which had appalled their souls, had however scarcely subsided; the awful voice, which they besought the Lord that they might hear no more, had scarcely ceased to sound in their ears; when they openly denied the God of Israel, and constrained Aaron to make them a golden calf as an object of worship. Other occasions occurred, when seemingly deep and solemn impressions were made on their minds; impressions which we should suppose could never be erased; which however soon vanished away, and left no trace behind. Facts of this description gave rise to the complaint in our text.

It is not improbable, that while reading of such occurrences, the thought has passed through the mind, that the children of Israel were a



singularly strange and stupid people. Yet, my dear hearers, in this very thing, "there is nothing new under the sun." While the human heart retains its character, and there remains a world to allure and a devil to tempt, there will be calls to unslumbering watchfulness; there will be danger of dread revolt and of severe divine rebuke. Nay, my friends, if we see no present reason for such rebuke with respect to God's American Israel, we are inattentive or unskillful observers of "the signs of the times."

Our beloved country has been the theatre on which God has displayed the wonders of his love and power. He has opened over us the windows of heaven, and poured down blessings in rich abundance. He has come down like rain upon the mown grass. Revival has followed revival, till they have been witnessed as common occurrences. Thousands of sinners have been solemnly impressed—thousands have been converted to God. Thousands of Christians have been refreshed. And yet, revivals of religion have for the most part been of short continuance. Christians have grown cold and inactive, when they had the most reason to be warm and devoted. Serious impressions have worn off from many, when they should have been deepening. Conversions have ceased just at the point of time when they should have been multiplied. Why have these things been so? It is a cheap and easy mode of disposing of this question to say, "God is a sovereign—Jehovah has withdrawn the influences of his Spirit." I solemnly protest against thus laying the sins of men to God's charge. Let us never dive into the secret counsels of the Lord, to ascertain what his word and providence have written as in sunbeams. Reasons enough exist in the church and people of God, to account for all, in relation to this subject, with which we have any concern. To some of the reasons why revivals of God's work decline, your attention will now be directed, premising that the preacher fully admits the divine sovereignty, and the special influences of the Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the sanctification and comfort of saints. Paul went not too far when he said, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."

1. The first cause of declension to which I would direct your attention is, *the lack of well-directed and persevering exertion on the part of the professed followers of the Lord Jesus*. God works by means in the kingdom of his grace, as well as in the kingdom of nature. He has established a very close connection between *planting* and *watering* and that *increase* which it is his glorious and sovereign prerogative to bestow. Although we cannot, in this thing, make one hair white or black, yet hath he committed the rich treasure to earthen vessels. He uses human agency to preach the gospel; to multiply and disseminate copies of the Bible; and to make and scatter religious tracts, those mute yet divinely eloquent messengers of the divine mercy. Human agency is also employed to provide the men and means to bear the messages of love to the perishing heathen; to conduct Sabbath schools, those nurseries of heaven, in which millions of young immortals are trained for usefulness on earth and glory in the world of spirits. And men must offer up those prayers by which the windows of heaven are shut and opened. And there has often been observed a striking proportion between the character of the means used, and the effects produced. When we sow sparingly, we reap sparingly. When the church of God is "clear as the sun and fair as the moon," she is "terrible as an army with banners." It is

recorded of the people of God, that when they *walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they WERE MULTIPLIED.*

Now it has often been observed, that when the Spirit is poured out from on high, and the work of the Lord revived, not only is the gospel preached with unusual frequency, pungency and affection, but the prayers of God's people are offered up with unwonted fervency and importunity; there is a beauty and consistency about their lives, which exemplifies the religion they profess; and an affection and urgency about the instructions and invitations they address to sinners, which render them deeply impressive. They become anxious, and are often heard to inquire what they must do to be saved; and at such times many are convinced, and converted unto God.

After a while, new cases of awakened interest and serious impression diminish, and at length cease, and many who have been impressed gradually decline and fall back. Now, if you inquire, you will find that there has been not only a simultaneous, but a preceding declension on the part of professors of religion. One and another has begun to absent himself from the praying circle. One and another has lost his fervency in devotion. One and another has ceased to feel for sinners, and exert himself as he once did. And before the church is aware of her danger, the work of God has ceased, and the harp is hung upon the willows. The probability is that if the church had maintained her ground, the work of God would have progressed with increased interest and strength. Let Christians weigh this matter well; for if they cannot prove that they are straitened in God, who has never said to the seed of Jacob, "*Seek ye me in vain,*" they have a tremendous responsibility.

2. Another reason for the declension of revivals is, *the self-sufficiency of men.* God, as we have shown, works by means. We are accustomed to see what we denominate the means of grace, attended with wonderful effects in the conviction and conversion of sinners. We find a connection established between them in the word of God, and are imperceptibly led to lose sight of the efficient cause—so far, at least, as to forget our entire dependence. Against this proud delusion, neither ministers of the gospel nor private Christians are always on their guard. Those to whom their labors may have been blest, often assist the delusion. It is not an easy thing to repress pride, vain glory and self-sufficiency, when we believe, or are told, that such a sermon, exhortation, admonition, or prayer, was the means of conviction, conversion or comfort to souls. We can easily be made to believe that it is so, and then to feel no small degree of complacency arising from it. In such a state of mind, we may easily be led to expect more from our efforts than facts will warrant, and look for the results of faith from the exercise of presumption. While God honors the faith which is the fruit of his own Spirit, he frowns our presumption into the dust. Is not this a reason why we are left to gather the apples of Sodom while we are vainly expecting the fruit of the tree of life? If we imbibe any portion of that spirit in which Nebuchadnezzar cried, "*Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the house of the kingdom?*" we may expect his reward. Samson had exercised his great strength so long that he forgot where it lay, and went out with his locks shorn, yet saying, "*I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself;*" and he wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

Such a spirit is much more frequently exercised, it is to be feared, than

that which animated Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, when, after one of his splendid victories, in passing through a village, he was greeted with more honor than he thought due to any mortal, he rebuked the multitude by saying, "If ye treat me as a god, God will soon show you that I am no more than a man." When we do not act under the influence of such a spirit of humble dependence, God will write his "Ichabod" upon our efforts, and leave us to the weakness of our own strength. From this we may learn why our clouds often produce so little rain, and why the chariot of the gospel frequently stops short in the midst of its course. In this work, peculiarities of modes are comparatively nothing; *humble reliance upon God, in the use of means which he has appointed, every thing.* Let us beware how we mar God's work by using our own untempered mortar. Let this be every minister's motto—every Christian's motto, "Son of man, can these dry bones live? O Lord God, thou knowest."

3. There is another cause of a directly opposite nature to the last, which exerts an unhappy influence on the progress of revivals: I mean *a professed dependence on God not warranted by his word.* In this way the doctrines of the divine sovereignty and the influences of the Holy Spirit are sadly abused. The thorough Antinomian is continually on the rack lest he should dishonor God by the use of means in the accomplishment of the purposes of divine love and mercy. Sometimes also there appears to be so little of human agency in the production of revivals, that men of better principles and better feelings have, before they were aware of it, fallen into the same spirit, and sunk down into a state of inactivity and apathy. Thus the devil leads men to pervert the truth concerning the sovereignty of God, and to pamper their sloth by pretending to honor Jehovah, when in fact they are only excusing their own sins.

Now there may be very little visible human agency in the *commencement* of some revivals. There may be nothing more than the ordinary preaching of the gospel, and still sinners, in greater or less numbers, may be awakened and converted to God. And it is sometimes as it were the salvation of a church, that the Lord should thus come; otherwise the church might die, or sink in deep disgrace. But most certainly this is not God's ordinary mode of proceeding in a revival. And even if he thus commence his work, he does not thus carry it on. No one ever yet witnessed an extensive and long continued work of grace, where a church remained cold or inactive. With her declension the work has declined. If God said, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord," it was immediately added, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." We cannot hope in God, except we use the appointed means. He has promised good to Israel; but he has also said, "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." While he will have us *trust*, as if we felt that all our sufficiency was of him, he will have us *act*, as if all depended upon our efforts. A contrary course has caused many a hopeful prospect to vanish away. O when shall we learn true wisdom?

4. *The very enjoyment* experienced in a revival of religion is sometimes the cause of its declension. The cup may appear to be so full, that we do not feel the necessity of having it replenished. We are easily led to think, that after our toils and labors have been so abundantly blessed of the Lord, we may now sit down and enjoy the pleasant fruit in peace and quietness. We are now *rich and increased with goods, and have*

*of nothing, and may say to the soul, Take thine ease.* While enjoying the fellowship of those who have been born of God, we lose sight of the far greater number who are still without God and without hope. We feel not the power of temptation, and fondly flatter ourselves that the old serpent's head is crushed beneath our feet. We feel it so good to be on the mount, that we sometimes incline to slumber there.

Think it not strange, my friends, if I tell you, that many a veteran has dropped asleep on this ground, and many a warm-hearted recruit has slumbered by his side. The latter is in peculiar danger. Unacquainted with the trials of the Christian life, and the dangers of the Christian warfare, it is not very surprising, that after he has fought his way to the cross, under the pressure of a heavy burden, and through hosts of opposing foes, and found peace in believing, and joy in the Holy Ghost, he should fondly imagine that all his trials are over, and that he shall accomplish the remainder of the journey without toil or trouble. Whereas, in fact, the warfare commences at this point. Strange, that the very fullness of our table should be made a snare to us, and the exuberance of the divine goodness cause us to forget our most important duties!

These things ought not so to be. On the contrary, the manifestations of the divine goodness should make us more zealous and more active in the Lord's service. But alas, it may be recorded of others beside Hezekiah, "He rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him."

5. *Want of faith in the divine promises*, is another cause why revivals decline. We are afraid to give that full scope to the divine promises which the language in which they are couched will warrant. When a number have been brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvelous light, we seem to think that all has been done that we may hope for. This sentiment, has a natural tendency to contract our desires, cool our ardor, and restrain our prayers and exertions; and as a natural consequence, to limit the blessing which might be expected on persevering and well directed efforts. But here, again, we are not straitened in the Lord, but in our own souls. Why should we limit the Holy One of Israel? Why should we circumscribe his promises? Will any one say, Because heretofore the work of conversion has stopped at a given point? Was the work ever known to stop while faith was in exercise? Did the Holy Spirit ever withdraw his influences till he was grieved by unbelief and sin?

How do we know that it is not the will of God that every sinner within the bounds of a congregation, a village, a city, a state or a continent should be converted to him? Why should we suppose that the time has not come? Not only are all things possible with God, but he warrants our strongest faith with his exceedingly great and precious promises. We may lay hold on his omnipotence. What did the Savior mean, when he said, "All things are possible to him that believeth?" Now what does God say to his people? "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." And what are the Lord's designs concerning our world? That his gospel shall be preached to every creature under heaven; that he will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh; that the Lord Jesus Christ shall receive the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. Why are not these blessed promises fulfilled? Can you give me a better reason than that his church is still full of that unbelief which freezes the hearts, restrains the prayers and

paralizes the arms of his people? Banish this unbelief from the church, and revivals will never cease. "The word of the Lord will have free course and be glorified." The circle of divine influence will be so extended that it shall embrace the whole earth. God says continually, "Stretch thy desires abroad."

6. *Want of concert in desire, in prayer, and in effort*, is another reason why revivals do not continue longer and spread wider. Says the Savior, "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Why does not this promise apply in all its force, to revivals of religion? Do they not concern the divine glory? Do they not harmonize with the purposes of divine love and mercy, as declared in the Scriptures? A contrary supposition would be a libel on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples, waiting for "the promise of the Father," were of one heart and one mind, and continued instant in prayer. There is more in this than we are apt to imagine. An insulated individual may be able to accomplish comparatively little—yet, under God, he can do something. Associate one with him, of the same heart and mind, and you more than double his strength, as well as increase his courage. Elijah *alone*, is a very different man from Elijah associated with seven thousand in Israel, who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. O, how verdant and beautiful would the church appear in the midst of this barren wilderness, if each of her members, in harmony and concert with his fellows, were found cultivating the little spot assigned him with care and assiduity, and when occasion required it, all uniting their strength and efforts! Soon would the cheering voice be heard, "Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes." The streams of grace from the wells of salvation would flow forth with a deeper and more rapid current. The verdant spot would become enlarged, until it should embrace the whole earth—and "trees of righteousness" would every where spring up, and "the fruit thereof should shake like Lebanon," and "the leaves thereof should be for the healing of the nations."

Were we to examine our churches with a reference to this point, we should be equally astonished and grieved. Even in our seasons of deepest and holiest interest, most fervent prayer, strongest exertion, and richest blessing, we should not perhaps find one half of the church, perhaps in many cases not even a tenth, to have entered fully into the spirit of the work. Many would be found to have been entirely unmoved. Some in the ranks of opposition. And many who appeared most active, would be found influenced by mere temporary feeling, excited by sympathy. While the real "working men" in the Lord's vineyard, the men of spiritual "bone and muscle," the men who faint not in prayer, but "bear the heat and burden of the day," "the sacramental host" who "stand shoulder to shoulder," and steadily follow "the Captain of salvation," would be found a "little flock." Such a survey would do away our surprise that revivals so soon cease—that so little is accomplished. Nay, it is matter of wonder that even so much is done by such feeble means.

7. *The indulgence of a sectarian, or party spirit*, has an unhappy influence on revivals of religion. Many a hopeful prospect has been blasted by it. It is among the arrangements of Providence, that various sects should exist in his church; though they have doubtless been occasioned by the obliquity of man, and if good arises out of them, it is because they are overruled by Jehovah; according to that



declaration, "the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." It is a revealed truth, that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." So long as our differences are maintained in a Christian spirit, provoking us to godly jealousy and good works, they may answer useful purposes. But when they put on the form of selfishness, envy, and strife, the Spirit of God cannot abide them, nor will he dwell with them.

This spirit is not very apt to manifest itself in the freshness of a new revival, where the worth and salvation of souls swallows up, for a season, all other considerations. But when the fruits of the work begin to exhibit themselves, we are easily led to calculate our sectional interests in its results and to pursue them as a primary object. This is sometimes done by discussing the points which separate the sects, in the public ministrations; sometimes by making them frequent subjects of conversation; and sometimes by the application of motives addressed to the individual.

When such a spirit gets into operation, we lose sight of the state and danger of sinners, their conversion becomes a secondary object. We cease to follow them up with those arguments and persuasions which the gospel furnishes. Our prayers lose their fervency and importunity, and a disputatious and angry spirit is engendered, which grieves the blessed Comforter, and causes him to depart. He cannot dwell in such a scene. He will not bless our selfish efforts. Men thus seek their own, when they should be seeking the things of Christ. Thus souls are ruined, and the Savior is dishonored, and hell rejoices. It may be that offences must come, but woe to them by whom they come. There is a fearful responsibility attached to such a course, in which all should be afraid to involve themselves. Let it be remembered that the highest object at which we can aim is *the glory of God in the salvation of sinners*, and let us be careful how we hinder this great work.

8. The last particular to which I would direct your attention, as injurious to the progress of revivals is, *an undue excitement of the mere animal part of our nature*. I say, *undue excitement*, because it is impossible to affect the mind to any great extent, and not influence our bodily sensations by it. The connection between mind and body is very intimate. Nor is it surprising that the body should deeply feel the influence of the mind, when employed upon subjects of such high and tremendous import, as those which religion presents. Nor is religion irrespective of the body. God requires the service of the body as well as of the mind. And it is right that it should be so, for man is not a purely intellectual being. It is, however, to the soul that God addresses himself, and from the impressions which he makes on the soul, does religion arise. And just so far as mere bodily sensations predominate, do they lower the character of our religion. The apostle Paul makes an admirable distinction when, in writing to Timothy he says, "Bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." The impressions which truth, when rightly presented to the mind, produces, do not, generally, to any very great extent, affect the body. I say, *when rightly presented*, for truth may be so presented, as to have its principal effect on the imagination or the nerves, leaving the understanding without much light or conviction, and the heart without any emotions of genuine love to God or sorrow for sin.

Do you ask, In what way does high excitement operate unhappily on revivals of religion, particularly with respect to their continuance? Let it be observed, that high excitement cannot be long maintained without a miracle. The human body cannot bear it. Health would soon decline, and the nerves would become a wreck. If it were originally a purely mental excitement, long continued, it would inevitably wear out the body. And whatever exercise the soul, in a disembodied state, might endure, it admits of no dispute, that, connected as it is with the body, after intense application, it sighs for relaxation, and if it be not relieved, it breaks down under the pressure. If then, high excitement be necessary to revivals of religion, the very laws which govern our nature render it absolutely necessary that they be short-lived, in proportion to the height of the excitement. It would then be a mercy that they are not of long continuance. The necessity, however, is not admitted.

Let it be farther observed, that action and reaction are equal. Undue excitement will consequently be followed by a proportionate depression. It might therefore be anticipated, that a revival which has been accompanied by a highly excited state of feeling, would be soon succeeded by coldness and inactivity.

My dear friends, this is not mere fancy, an idle speculation. I would it were nothing more. It is mournful history of mournful facts. It is one of the instruments with which the enemy destroys the carved work of the sanctuary—one of the clogs which he fastens to the wheels of the chariot of salvation to retard its progress through the earth.

It has thus been attempted, to exhibit some of the causes which retard the progress of revivals of religion, and disappoint the hopes entertained of their continuance and extended results. The views which have been taken are now affectionately submitted to your serious and prayerful consideration. The preacher rejoices in having been a *friend*, an *old friend*, to revivals. His public life was commenced under the sunshine of Jehovah's favor, amid the gentle and long continued, but refreshing rain of divine grace, and he has lived to record his gratitude to God, for repeated visitations of his mercy, extending through near a quarter of a century. He has endeavored to make you acquainted with the fruit of his experience in relation to the particular point which has engaged our attention.

It has not been designed, in any wise, to disparage efforts for the promotion of revivals, but to show how they may be rendered more pure, become of longer continuance, and be productive of greater blessings.

It is firmly believed, and fondly expected, that a more glorious day for the church is near at hand. And that day will be accelerated, as well as characterized, by revivals of religion. But revivals so purely scriptural as to throw the devices of men into the shade, and exhibit in Pentecostal relief the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. O, when that day comes, the subjection of the world to Christ will no longer be a problem.

But before that day, the church herself has much to learn on the subject of revivals. She must study them diligently and prayerfully by the light of God's holy oracles, and then shall she know her own state and duty. In this every Christian has a deep and a direct interest. They are all called into the Lord's vineyard to labor there. And the Lord seems to be renewing the exhortation, "Cast ye up, cast ye up: prepare the way, take up the stumbling-blocks out of the way of my people."

Of these stumbling-blocks, there are not a few which require to be removed. To point them out has been the object of this discourse. I ask you my brethren, is there not a lamentable deficiency of well-directed and persevering exertion? Is there nothing of self-sufficiency when men talk, perhaps loudly, of "getting up revivals?" Is there that entire dependence on God to which our utter impotence calls us? Do not some sit down to enjoy the blessing, instead of prosecuting their labors with new zeal and diligence? Are they not afraid to exercise that enlarged and strong faith which the promises of God not only allow, but require? Is there no lack of concert in desire, in prayer, and in effort? Is the peculiar spirit of sects dead? Is not mere excitement often sought after, and relied on, instead of the deep, and holy, and transforming influences of the Divine Spirit? In a word; Are not revivals too much like a morning cloud, and the early dew? And yet there is nothing in their nature, nor in the word of God, which forbids their continuance and spread, till every saint shall be thoroughly revived and sanctified, and every sinner converted.

If there are hindrances in the way, let them be sought out, and removed; and let each one lay hold of that hindrance which lies the nearest to his own door, and see to it that it be removed. Let each one be sure that his own spirit and conduct is in harmony with the will of God and the influences of the Holy Spirit. Ah! the church, in its various branches, has yet much to mourn over, much to repent of.

Let each of us labor to bring this subject home to our bosoms, and as certain our own responsibilities. Let us ask ourselves, does no sin lie at my door? Have I never grieved away the Holy Spirit by my sloth, my lack of faith and prayer and confidence in God, my sectarian selfishness, my presumption, denominated by an apostle, "faith without works," my reliance on excited feelings without grace? Let us not be afraid to come to the law and the testimony to learn our faults and our duties. We have much to learn, and if we will sit down to the study of the holy oracles with an humble, teachable and prayerful spirit, we shall lack none of that wisdom which is profitable to direct. We shall then be found fellow-workers with God in building up his holy kingdom, and be happily instrumental in hastening on "the latter day glory."

And now let it be remembered, let it be impressed upon our hearts, that every denomination, every church, every Christian, every human being, has a deep interest in revivals of religion—in their existence, their purity, and their results. They are the peculiar displays of the power and grace of God, for the good of souls. They have no enemies but the enemies of God and human happiness. Let it then be our prayer, and labor too, that they may gloriously prevail, and spread, and fill the whole earth. And let God, through Christ, have all the glory. Amen.